

**Remarks by Ambassador Shari Villarosa  
AFCP Grant Signing Ceremony**

Honorable Mukheshwar Choonee, Minister of Arts and Culture;  
Distinguished guests:

I am delighted to be with you this afternoon to sign this grant agreement from the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation with Minister Choonee. This grant will help build the capabilities of Mauritians to preserve their rich cultural history well into the future.

Set up in 2001, the Ambassador's Fund supports projects around the world that restore ancient and historic buildings, assess and conserve rare manuscripts and museum collections, preserve and protect important archaeological sites, and document vanishing traditional craft techniques and indigenous languages.

The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation has supported more than 750 projects in more than 120 countries—contributing more than \$40 million towards cultural heritage preservation needs around the globe.

Why do we do this, you might ask? Why is the U.S. Embassy interested in preserving Mauritian cultural heritage? The United States believes that as we move toward an increasingly technologically sophisticated and interconnected world, cultural differences tend to blur and traditional forms of cultural expression start to disappear. The United States which is highly respected as a leader in technological innovation, is also a leader in historical and cultural preservation to serve as a continuing reminder of the contributions and historical experiences that have made us what we are. The United States is also one of the most culturally diverse nations which has given us a deep respect for the many cultures that not only influence Americans, but influence people around the world. This is why we are proud to preserve cultural heritage around the world.

Traditionally, preserving cultural heritage has meant conserving historic buildings, monuments and works of art. But starting in the 1960s, thanks to a growing appreciation of diverse cultures and modes of cultural expression, the preservation of cultural heritage has expanded to encompass “intangible” cultural expressions such as music, language and dance. For instance, the Mauritian sega “typique” has been rightly accepted by UNESCO as an intangible cultural expression.

At the U.S. Embassy, we consider Mauritian traditional building techniques and craftsmanship as an intangible cultural expression worth preserving. We are pleased that this grant will help preserve the traditional craftsmanship of Mauritian masons, carpenters, stone cutters, tinsmiths and shingle makers that was in danger of being lost to the world. This project will provide continuing support for future preservation efforts by training craftsmen to understand and work with these techniques to preserve important treasures of the Mauritian culture. We believe that safeguarding and perpetuating this craftsmanship will preserve the story of Mauritius, and thus we are very pleased to assist in this effort.

The Safeguarding of Traditional Building Techniques and Craftsmanship project submitted by the National Heritage Fund was one of 46 projects selected for funding from among 149 other entries around the world. This grant will help restore four national heritage sites that illustrate significant periods in Mauritian history.

More important than restoring and rehabilitating particular sites, will be the training provided to local craftsmen in traditional techniques so that they can carry out the restoration work and train future generations of craftsmen. We also hope that the project will create an awareness among the people of Mauritius of the need to preserve the many influences that have come together to shape Mauritian cultural heritage.

The United States has supported other cultural preservations projects in Mauritius with our Mauritian friends, such as a 2002 project to set up an oral history unit at the National Archives. We must capture the rich memories of those people who shaped Mauritius into what it is today.

Today many institutions, individuals, and governments contribute to preserving cultural heritage in all its forms, tangible and intangible alike. I congratulate the Ministry of Arts and Culture and the dedicated staff members of the National Heritage Fund for their efforts in safeguarding the rich heritage of Mauritius – both tangible and intangible.

Thank you for your interest in cultural preservation and for your commitment to protecting and restoring your nation's cultural treasures. Protecting your cultural heritage will enrich world cultures. Again we are delighted to work with you and look forward to seeing traditional Mauritian craftsmanship revive and create tangible reminders for many years to come of Mauritius' rich and very diverse cultural legacy.